

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton**  
**Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade**  
**Hearing on “An Update on the Takata Airbag Ruptures and Recalls”**  
**June 2, 2015**

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

An airbag is a safety measure you hope you never need – if you do need it, you need it to work exactly right. I had my own incident with an airbag while back in Michigan just two weeks ago. It was in the evening, pitch black, while driving on the interstate at 70 mph when I struck two deer. I was lucky that my seat belt worked and my air bag deployed – just as they were designed. It’s a scary moment for anyone and I remember thinking, “I’m very lucky I didn’t have a defective Takata airbag.” And then I thought, “the safety of your airbag can’t be a game of luck.”

Being from the auto state, which includes Takata’s headquarters in Auburn Hills, Michiganders understand better than most just how complicated cars are and how much goes into each and every part. Cars are safer today than ever before. As miles driven and the age of the car go up, deaths and injuries have gone down.

What concerns me today, though, are multi-year safety investigations where we can identify a problem but a solution is nowhere in sight; where the preferred approaches are band-aids instead of an effective cure. In these Takata airbags we have a problem that has persisted for years. And again we have NHTSA opening an initial investigation and closing it before revisiting it years later.

This technology is truly rocket science. But you don’t need to be a rocket scientist to see that more needs to be done and that it should have been done sooner. When lives are put in jeopardy, delay is deadly. There wasn’t much doubt at our December hearing that the airbags were defective, but it still took six months to say so.

Dr. Rosekind was not the administrator when we held our last hearing in December and there has been some positive movement of late. Now, Takata is changing its formulation of propellant in the replacements on the driver’s side – either because someone else is making it or because they are using improved formulations of their own. But this is not the case on the passenger’s side. Instead they continue to try to perfect an innumerable set of manufacturing variables, which for ten plus years have resisted perfection. Do we trust that this time the moisture won’t get in and everything else will be perfect?

Once we have safe replacements, we need people to actually replace them. Recall rates of 15-30 percent are unacceptable. We must understand what the plan is from NHTSA and the automakers. NHTSA will for the first time act as a central coordinator. Such a move seems warranted, if not overdue, but we need to clearly understand the plan so that it can be relayed to the public.

The messaging around these airbag recalls has been tortured at best. We need more information, and clearer information for consumers. I am concerned that NHTSA and Takata decided to release head turning, headline grabbing recall numbers at a time when the information is not yet actionable for consumers. Drivers read about the biggest recall in history, but could not look-up if their car was part of the recall. How does that help safety? Surely a better way exists.

At a time when this committee should be focusing more on how to update NHTSA, how to incentivize the rollout of better safety technologies, and how to improve recall take rates we are instead forced to understand why safety, our very highest priority, seems relegated to the back lot. Testing is overdue. Change is overdue. Safe replacement parts are overdue. Six months ago I asked the question, “What should I say to the mom in Michigan who asks me if she and her family are safe behind the wheel?” Six months later I unfortunately have to ask the same question. We will have as many hearing as needed and require as much reporting to this committee as needed to ensure that this problem is finally resolved - restoring the safety of our nation’s roadways and the trust of the American people.

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